

Ooga booga!

Scare you? Sorry, we just wanted to get everyone in the mood. Horror is, after all, a tricky business. In the normal course of events, people seek to avoid experiences redolent with fear, horror and shock. Yet films and books dealing with the most graphic forms of violence, grue and terror regularly tote up healthy receipts at the cash register.

In other words, under certain controlled conditions, people obviously *love* to be scared. To that end, software creators have periodically attempted to integrate spooky characters and situations into their work, sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

The first authentically scary moment in the history of electronic gaming came, ironically, in a program that was not overtly intended to be frightening. Lucasfilm's *Rescue on Fractalus* (Epyx) is a science-fiction contest in which users pilot a spacecraft over the surface of a barren, craggy planet in search of downed Earth pilots. When the wreckage of a ship is sighted, the player lands his own craft and opens the hatch to permit the downed flyer to come aboard. On very rare occasions, however, these flyers are not human at all, but Jaggi—members of the hostile race with whom the humans are contesting. The Jaggi kill the pilots and don their spacesuits, hoping to lure a rescue craft, then, once aboard, destroy it.

The only discernable difference be-



Nightmare on Elm Street (LJN for NES)

tween an authentic flyer and a Jaggi in sheep's clothing is the slight, greenish tint a Jaggi gives to the ordinarily silver space helmet. If the player spots the Jaggi before it reaches his ship, he can take off, incinerating the alien fiend in a blast of propulsion rockets. Otherwise, the player is in for a genuinely startling experience: The Jaggi, its helmet discarded, rears up directly in front of the player's windshield. The horrible creature roars once then, its massive fists clenched tightly, begins to

smash away at the windshield. Huge fissures appear in the glass, and then, a second later, the entire shield explodes, and the game fades to black.

The appearance of the Jaggi was a real shocker for gamers in the early '80s. It wasn't mentioned in the instructions and, so, came as a total surprise to most users. Experienced players often sat for hours while novices tested their skills, just waiting for their companion's reactions at the appearance of the Jaggi.

Certainly, there had been haunted-house adventures and games featuring ghosts, bats and similar spook-house trappings before *Fractalus*, but none of them could seriously aspire to frighten users. The lack of sophisticated graphics, animation and sound made any real attempt to create a creepy ambience fairly futile. Block-like graphics and beep-boop sound effects were hardly the stuff of dark and stormy nights, after all.

Quests for Chills

The first attempts at games that could frighten us were text adventures, such as Galley and Lawrence's *Moonmist* (Infocom), a haunted-house mystery set on the atmospheric Cornwall coast. The player is urgently invited to an ancient castle by an old lover who fears her life is in danger from the spectral "White Lady"



Captain Blood



It Came From the Desert

The *Uninvited* is notably the finest use of the ICOM adventure interface. The player stumbles through this fascinating, if somewhat musty, old mansion, searching not for jewels or magic spells but for the secret of the house itself.

Perhaps the most popular haunted-house adventure was Lucasfilm's excellent *Maniac Mansion* (Activision). The plot, in which the player-character explores a haunted house, is nothing new, but the game interface and the cleverness of its execution helped make this a genuine cult classic with a large audience on both sides of the Atlantic.

The trappings of horror and psychological terror are expertly blended by the Murry siblings in *Manhunter: New York* (Sierra), a graphic adventure in which the player starts the game on the wrong side of the ethical fence. In this story, Earth has been conquered by a race of alien eyeballs. The computerist is cast as a manhunter, one of the human beings who hunt down their fellows at the command of their alien masters. The player proceeds through a startling and sometimes violent adventure that turns on an unusual moral dilemma: Does the player remain a manhunter, or does he turn on the aliens and fight their tyranny?

The newest entry into the scary adven-

ture sweepstakes is *Personal Nightmare* (Box Office). This menu- and icon-driven illustrated adventure by Mike Woodruffe incorporates many scenes derived from the classic horror genre. The sound and graphics are outstanding, and cinematic effects coupled with extensive use of animation create scenes with the power to shock the player.

The same designer and publisher is working on a game based on the TV horror-movie hostess with the mostest, Elvira. The game will be published first in England under the Horrorsoft banner, but it could reach the U.S. before the end of the year.

Big Monsters

One of the most popular categories of spooky games is the one that deals with giant monsters, behemoths, dinosaurs and colossal versions of ordinary life-forms.

The first product to exploit our ancient fascination with really, really *big* monsters was *Crush, Crumble and Chomp* from Automated Simulations. Automated Simulations, of course, later became Epyx, and *C, C and C* was eventually restyled as *The Movie Monster Game*, a delightful romp through several of the world's major cities as Godzilla or one of

several other mega-monster staples. Of course, life isn't all beer and skittles, even if you are 50 feet tall and breathe fire. There's the army, for example, with their tanks and jet fighters, and they can really get a guy down.

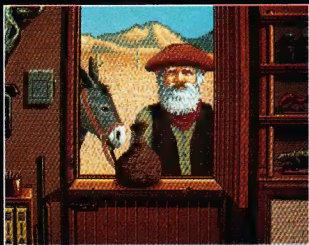
Other electronic entertainments that employ the big boys are *Rampage* (Activision) and *Aargh!* (Arcadia). *Rampage* is an excellent adaptation of the classic coin-op. Players control a variety of antisocial behemoths in an attempt to tear down buildings and generally snuff out life in a major metropolitan area before the army arrives and poops out the party. *Aargh!* is basically a clone of *Rampage* with different monsters. The object is to destroy buildings and retrieve the golden eggs which periodically appear on-screen.

The major difference between *The Movie Monster Game* and the others is that *TMMG* uses a realistic perspective, with monsters free to move over large land areas, whereas *Rampage* and *Aargh!* stick to side perspective with action limited to the on-screen area.

The most recent addition to the big monster game battery is also the best ever: Cinemaware's spectacular *It Came From the Desert*. This chilling adventure is based on 1950s SF-horror films like *Tarantula*, *Beginning of the End*, *The*



It Came From the Desert



Deadly Mantis and, especially, the first and foremost of the big bug epics, Gordon Douglas' *Them!*

The player is cast as the handsome young protagonist who first discovers that there are gigantic insects among us while tooling across the desert. The player has a variety of vehicles at his command, including a jeep, tank and helicopter, and they'll all be needed before this menace can be quelled. The visuals on *It Came From the Desert* are astonishing, the cinematic ambience delightful and the play value is strong. This may well be the strongest entry yet from a major new publisher.

Finally, a quick mention of the excellent *SimCity* (Maxis), in which the user creates and runs either actual cities or creates his own town from scratch. Once a city is up and running, the user can send disasters down upon it, including fires, floods, earthquakes—and even a giant, Godzilla-like monster who emerges from the sea and lays waste to any area it passes through!

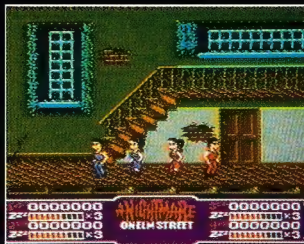
Arcade Spook House

The most popular category of games featuring monsters, however, remains arcade games. Generally speaking, these games don't make special use of the creepy characters; vampires, ghosts and goblins replace space aliens or orcs as integers in basically generic action games.

Warlock is one of the better examples of the monster arcade genre. The player character moves through a dual-level

scenario of graveyards and catacombs, killing off a cavalcade of zombies, ghosts and demons along the way. The delightful graphics and clever animation elevate this side-perspective shoot-out beyond the level of a typical mindless shoot-out.

Vampire's Empire, from Digitek, is another visually-appealing action game using stock horror characters. The player-character in this scrolling, side-view contest moves up and down the vast stairways that wind endlessly through this vampiric netherworld. The action is



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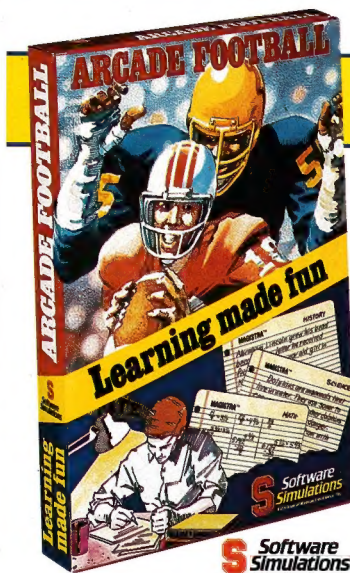
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fairly humdrum, but the slick graphics certainly are first rate.

Baal, from Psynopsis, exploits the visual imagery created by artist H.R. Giger for the film *Alien* to create an action-strategy game with insectoid monsters and a sweaty, heavy-metal look. This side-perspective contest features multidirectional scrolling through three multilevel scenarios comprising 250 screens, 100 monsters and 400 traps. It's nothing special, but the graphics are striking, and the monsters look great.

The newest addition to this category is Accolade's *Frightmare*, a platform game comprising over 80 levels with seven scenarios or "dream states," each more harrowing than the last, as the player battles the time limit in an attempt to survive the night. Zombies, werewolves, serpents and even old Lucifer himself show up during the contest.

There is certainly no shortage of monsters in the video-game universe, either. Capcom's *Ghosts and Goblins*, as well as Nintendo's own *Castlevania* and its sequel, *Simon's Quest*, have been popular entries on the Nintendo since their release. Also scheduled for release is Sunsoft's *Fester's Quest*, based on the popular *Addams Family* cartoons and TV show. Aliens have descended on the Addams' hometown and kidnapped the human population, leaving the inhuman Fester and the other members of the Addams Family to rescue them.

Freddy fans will have two *Nightmare on Elm Street* games to look forward to. Sharedata will be releasing *Nightmare on Elm Street* for various computers (it should be available by the time you read this). The setting is deep inside Freddy's house, and, of course, all events occur in a dream—well, nightmare.

LJN Toys hopes to have their NES version of *Nightmare on Elm Street* out in early 1990, though at press time it was still being developed. LJN also plans on bringing a Freddy game to Nintendo's Game Boy system.

Also of interest to NES players is *Friday the 13th* (LJN), a game that mirrors the sequel-crazy movies of the same name. In addition, Bandai has released *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* for the NES, in which the player must try to keep Dr. J (not the basketball player, mind you) from getting too irri-

tated by his surroundings. This will cause him to transform into his hideous alter ego.

Sega fright-freaks, meanwhile, can check out *Ghost House*, a multilevel, side-view action game in which a player-character must retrieve hidden jewels while avoiding the various spooks patrolling the mansion.

Sega Genesis owners will also have the sequel to the previously noted *Ghosts 'n' Goblins* available to them in the form of *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts*. This challenging fight for your life in a graveyard looks identical to the arcade game.

Finally, TurboGrafx-16 fanatics can get some chills up their spine with the eerie *Alien Crush* pinball game. Though this one stands alone on its pinball re-creation, the setting is unlike any flipper table ever built: Monsters pop out of every crevice of the game, a slathering beast swallows



Maniac Mansion



your sphere for bonus points and various creatures, skulls and insects swarm around in the bonus screen. *Alien Crush* uses the popular Giger-like graphics in stunning form.

Movie Monsters

Several of the biggest screen hits in recent years were horror films, and several of them made their way to computer and video-game formats. This includes the number-one midnight movie of all time, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Electric

Dreams), *Aliens* (Activision) and *Predator* (computer versions by Activision).

In *Rocky Horror* the player is cast as either Brad or Janet, those unfortunate visitors to the mansion of Dr. Frank N. Furter and company. While "(Let's Do the) Time Warp" plays in the background, the player-character's clothes are stolen, and he or she must go on a room-to-room search in order to recover them. There's plenty to see and do in this bizarre homestead, and it makes for a pretty fair action game while remaining faithful to the source material.

Steve Cartwright, meanwhile, used many of the techniques he mastered while creating the *Hacker* (Activision) games to create *Aliens*, the best movie adaptation of any kind in the history of electronic gaming. The game is broken up into several sequences right out of James Cameron's pulse-pounding film. The best scenario is one in which the player monitors four patrols as they move along the catwalks underneath the planet's surface. By switching from monitor to monitor, the user can assist each of the patrols as they invariably run into the monsters of the game's title. The game builds its tension similar to the movie, climaxing in a battle with the alien queen herself.

Predator (Activision) is reminiscent of another film adaptation, *Platoon*, only here, in addition to fighting human enemies, there's an alien big-game hunter on the prowl to be dealt with. The game uses standard side perspective and arms the player-character with assault rifles, grenades and flame throwers, all of which will seem fairly feeble when face-to-face with the Predator himself!

Monsters, Monsters and More Monsters!

There's no question about it, people like monsters and other scary things—so long as they remain part of the fictional universe. As the audio-visual capabilities of home computers and video-game systems increase, it seems inevitable that horror will become an even bigger part of the software universe.

So brew up that hot chocolate, stoke up the fireplace and boot up the electronic game system, because the computer may well be the "shock theater" of the next decade. ☺

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